Professional Learning Goals Statement

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In January of 2001, President George W. Bush introduced *No Child Left Behind*. In an attempt to increase the academic success of all students with a focus on students who have been “left behind,” *No Child Left Behind* drastically changed our educational system. The effects of No Child Left Behind were both positive and negative. The law was supposed to present increased accountability for schools, more options for parents and students, greater flexibility for states, school districts, and schools, and an added emphasis on reading.

There are many criticisms to be referenced when discussing *No Child Left Behind.* Obviously, the intended purpose of the legislation was to promote academic success in the United States. However, it created more problems than it solved. To start with, it put all students under one category and did not account for individual differences. It promoted the use of standardized testing scores to deem schools as progressing or not progressing. As Smyth (2008) mentioned, so much pressure was put on teachers to perform that they began teaching to the test. Smyth (2008) also states, "teaching to the test has dramatic effects on the validity of the exam. Drilling students on specific methods to achieve high scores on standardized tests is ethically inappropriate conduct for teachers" (p. 134). However, if students do not achieve on the standardized tests, it looks bad on the teacher.

NCLB created a very unrealistic goal for 2014. By 2014, schools were supposed to reach 100% of students making Adequate Yearly Progress. To believe that every single student in the United States could reach proficiency in mathematics and reading by 2014 is impossible. This feature does not take into account all of our different types of learners. Many districts do not even have the appropriate resources for everyday learning and their students suffer from lack of opportunities.

Pederson (2007) also pointed out the negative impact NCLB had on non-tested subject areas. So much emphasis was put on mathematics and reading, that other areas began to suffer. These subject areas began losing priority, funding and resources. This will no doubt impact our students' deficits in these areas in the future.

One feature that I do support is the Highly Qualified initiative. I believe all teachers should be certified in the content area they are teaching. However, the route to certification is too easy. All it takes for a teacher to be considered “Highly Qualified” is passing a state content test. Study guide books are sold for preparation for these tests and many teachers can pass them by just studying the needed information. I do not believe this makes a teacher “Highly Qualified” when other teachers studied the subject for two years in college. I believe there should be some type of program, class or professional learning sessions that should be required in order for a teacher to receive certification in an area they did not specifically study in college. This would help to ensure the quality of instruction throughout our schools.

To reverse the negative impacts that No Child Left Behind placed on our students, I will use various techniques to enhance student learning. My first goal is to increase the use of technology in the classroom. I feel that allowing students to explore their creativity and imagination in nontraditional ways will promote their intrinsic motivation and take pressure away from the end of year testing. My second goal is to provide a more culturally celebrated environment. My third goal is to promote the importance of the fine arts programs at my school and to increase student awareness of these programs. Lastly, I will promote “deep learning” as opposed to drilling facts and teaching memorization to our students. These goals will help in increasing student achievement and academic success.

Goal One: Technology

For my first goal, increasing technology in the classroom, I will make many changes to my instructional approaches to add more technology use with every day assignments. We are currently dealing with students who are from what is popularly called the iGeneration. Our students spend so much time multitasking that many times, traditional instructional strategies tend to bore them. I want to find exciting ways to intrigue my students. Rosen (2011) states, “The iGeneration is a creative, multimedia generation. They think of the world as a canvas to paint with words, sights, sounds, video, music, web pages, and anything that they can create” (p. 20). Students are interested in using technology as a pathway to learning. Rosen (2011) suggests allowing students to use their iPods while doing their work. To an educator, this might seem distracting. To a student, it may keep them focused on the task at hand. I must remember that our students are different and have different needs. This does not mean I will allow them to take advantage of this idea, though. It can be hard to allow student use of technology in the classroom because of the potential for misuse; however, through careful observation and good classroom management, the task can be implemented.

In the technological age that we currently live in, I simply cannot ask students to ignore the technologies available to them while they are at school. They are involved in so many different things outside of school like text messaging, emailing, using Facebook or MySpace and other social networks, playing video games, and watching television. Our students can process many of these things at one time. I must take advantage of the iGeneration’s characteristics of multitasking. Rosen (2011) had an interesting finding as he states, “My research, and that of others, has shown that when kids interact online they are more honest and less shy than when they are in a face-to-face environment. Allowing some class discussion to happen online will encourage the shy students, those who never talk in class, to express themselves” (p. 21). Allowing students to expose their individual thoughts through anonymous systems such as these can help bring out knowledge that open classroom discussions would not. I must take ideas like these and be creative in getting the most out of my students.

Rosen (2010) gives many suggestions on implementing technology in the classroom. He recommends letting students “write some essays using all textisms and then translate each other’s into English” (p. 22). While some teachers may frown upon this, particularly English Language Arts teachers, it will get the creativity flowing for my students and they will enjoy the task as well. I will focus not on the mechanics of their writing itself, but the quality of the content in which they share. Many students have great thoughts and ideas but do not necessarily share them because of the way they feel comfortable communicating. If students are given this freedom to communicate the way they are used to, I believe I will see more depth in student learning.

I will also allow my students to have more options for using technology for projects. For example, students will be given various options for presentations such as: web design, cartoon animation via sites such as toondoo.com, Prezi and PowerPoint presentations, and voice recording. For an introduction project, the students will examine the three technological periods and the inventions that were developed during those times. The students will be able to choose from the above options for their final presentation to the class.

My students will also be given the assignment of creating a company and developing advertisements for it. They will be given many different options including commercial making, billboard design, web design, and business card design. All of these projects will be designed using technology.

The use of technology can greatly increase student participation and also establish excitement in the classroom that NCLB demolished via high stakes testing. High stakes testing has had drastic effects on our students and teachers. As Nichols and Berliner (2008) state, “High-stakes testing encourages teachers to view students not in terms of their potential, or what unique or new qualities they bring to the learning environment, but rather as test-score increasers or suppressors” (p. 16). This is exactly what I want to avoid – labeling my students as either an increaser or a suppressor. Our students are so much more than a test score. They are different and unique and can bring many exciting ideas to the classroom.

Goal Two: Culturally Responsive Environment

My second goal is to establish a culturally responsive environment for my classroom. Students will be much more comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas with the class if they know they can be themselves. Our students come from such diverse backgrounds and it is important to recognize and celebrate differences. In order to have a culturally celebrated environment, I will need to seek professional learning opportunities that involve multicultural education. I want to have extensive knowledge about racial groups in order to appropriately address racial and ethnic attitudes of students. As Banks and Banks (2012) state, “Make sure that your classroom conveys positive and complex images of various ethnic groups” (p. 195). If a successful multicultural curriculum is to be blended with the school curriculum, I must be prepared for the controversial issues that are sure to arise among our students. It is my hope that they leave my classroom interested and comfortable with different cultures.

One way to address these issues with students is to have students engage in role play. This enables the students “to express and to examine their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings related to racial prejudice and discrimination” (Banks and Banks, 2012, p. 191). I can also use various forms of resources outside of the textbook in order to convey different aspects of cultures. Increasing my own ethnic and cultural history can enhance my ability to integrate multicultural elements into the curriculum because my students will recognize a climate for sharing. My students need to see that I am open about my own ethnic and cultural history and that I am comfortable sharing. This should also motivate my students to do the same and “result in powerful learning for [my] students” (Banks and Banks, 2012, p. 191). I believe that taking part in these actions can increase my students’ knowledge of other cultures and also make them feel more comfortable sharing their ideas and cultural knowledge.

There are many things that affect multicultural education. Mainstream culture affects educators’ abilities to see and accommodate differences in students because mainstream culture does not have a “cultural perspective.” Banks and Banks (2012) also state that public school systems “marginalize differences and reinforce disparities” (p. 273). My way of teaching needs to work for all students so that they can reach their highest potential. I will begin the year with a multicultural theme that invites students to share their backgrounds. We will have discussions about controversial topics and I will make sure students know to be respectful. I will explain the importance of learning about different cultures. These discussions will become part of our curriculum and students will have the opportunity to research different cultures. After the first couple of weeks, we will choose one culture to study per week. This may be our start-up activity at the beginning of each class period. Students can bring in current events that relate to the specific culture and share with the class. It is my hope that infusing multicultural education in this way will promote a culturally responsive environment.

Banks and Banks (2012) write, “If schools cannot function without separating large numbers of children for ‘nonmainstream’ services outside the general education classroom, we need to challenge the culture of the classroom as one that is not reflecting the culture of communities” (p. 273). This quote makes me reflect on my school’s strategies for our EL students. Currently, they are pulled out of their academic classes for instructional time. Next year, they will be fully mainstreamed into all academic classes and teachers will be trained on teaching EL students with the assistance of an EL coach. I think this strategy will be much more beneficial and I am looking forward to the training I will receive that will help me to better serve our EL students. NCLB divided students up into subgroups which were then analyzed when test scores were received by schools. This division contributed to the multicultural divide that is present in our schools today. I believe that getting to know my students needs and backgrounds will only improve my instructional methods and help them to succeed in their endeavors.

Goal Three: Fine Arts

My third goal is to promote the importance of fine arts at my school. NCLB clearly established the two “most important” subjects as the law would have it: mathematics and reading. While these two subjects are very important, they alone do not compose a well-rounded education. NCLB left the “less important” subjects with poor funding, low priority, and deemed them invaluable without even realizing it. These subjects have suffered with low budgets for years and are now playing catch up. Being a teacher that has taught two content areas in our fine arts program, Physical Education and Engineering and Technology, I see the importance of including a variety of subjects in curriculum.

Pederson (2007) reports that NCLB left a devastating impact on nonassessed subjects. In her findings, she found four common themes: reduction of resources and time for non-tested subject areas, integration of non-tested subject content into the tested subject areas, increased alignment of curriculum and assessment with state standards, and no change. Since non-tested subjects received little or no funding/attention, it is only logical to assume that these students will suffer deficits in these areas. This feature undermines democratic principles because schools are supposed to be seeking to promote well-rounded students and when emphasis is only placed on certain subject areas, many subjects get left out – increasing our students’ deficits.

In terms of my actions for promoting fine arts at my school, I will speak with our six fine arts teachers about a parent night that is dedicated to the fine arts. For example, our art teacher could make tri-boards about different art colleges and speak about scholarship and career opportunities for students. For Business Education, our teacher could speak about all of the different career opportunities that exist for students who want to study business. Our physical education teacher could speak about the importance of living an active lifestyle and the benefits of having a healthy body mass index. Each content area could have the chance to promote their subject, not just for recruiting students to take their classes, but by making known all of the future opportunities students could have.

I will also promote in-school competitions within each fine arts program throughout the year. These competitions could be promoted on the daily announcements, on the board at the front of our school, and in the newspaper. For our art program, the art teacher could pick a theme and have students design artwork for that theme. We could have a panel of judges to vote on the top three and then reward those students with recognition and an award. I believe these competitions will boost our fine arts programs.

Goal Four: Deep Learning

Lastly, my fourth goal is to promote “deep learning.” I can provide many opportunities for my students to participate in deep learning. One of Confucius’ five virtues, right knowledge, is distinctly appropriate for how teaching should be carried out. I can maintain the right knowledge by participating in professional learning. I believe that participating in on-going professional development is necessary in order for me to maintain and further my educational knowledge. The professional development sessions should focus on many things including research-based instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and cultural proficiency. Confucius wrote about always staying “hungry for knowledge” which is a main idea in my educational philosophy. I believe that teachers who know they learn just as much from the students as the students do from them are to be admired. I also believe that when you do not know something, the best thing to do is admit it. Confucius wrote, “Do you want to know what knowledge is? When you know something, recognize that you know it, and when you don’t know something, recognize that you don’t know it. That’s knowledge” (Book 2, Chapter 17). Having the right attitude and moral courage, two of Confucius’ five virtues, are imperative in my ability to instruct students. My instruction should focus on increasing student knowledge and self-motivation so that they learn and want to explore their creativity and imagination. I will encourage my students to dream big dreams and then go and achieve them no matter the odds. I could not agree more when Hess (2009) states, “What we need is an education system that teaches deep knowledge, that values creativity and originality, and that values thinking skills” (p. 7).

Another of Confucius’ five virtues, right procedure, is necessary for the most beneficial learning. I believe that Conley (2011) accurately describes the difference between right and wrong procedure when he states, “Content mastery is not sufficient. As frustrating as it may be to hear, simply getting students to recall some facts or answer questions correctly on a test does not make them ready for college and careers – nor is it likely to guarantee high performance on the common assessments” (p. 20). I will teach my students to use their critical thinking skills and not just simple memorization techniques. Students will benefit much more from acquiring problem solving skills when they reach real world situations. Conley (2011) also recommends students being active learners. He describes an intriguing curriculum when he states, “curriculum that includes interesting problems, investigations, debates, simulations, games, Socratic questioning, presentations, projects, and other forms of learning that demand engagement will help maximize retention of key content and concepts” (p. 20). I will focus class projects on problem solving methods. For example, in Technology, students will use the ten steps in the Engineering Design Process for solving problems and working through projects.

Students learn best when our instructional strategies are not aimed at increasing standardized test scores. When our focus is on drilling facts and memorization, we fail to recognize the impact we have on their diminishing critical thinking skills. Conley (2011) states, “It is actually more difficult for students to retain the myriad bits of content they encounter during the school year when they are taught through test-prep” (p. 18). These are the ideas I will seek to fill my classroom with. In doing so, my students will be much more engaged and involved in their own learning and experience more meaningful instruction. NCLB stripped teachers of the motivation to encourage deep, meaningful learning. Instead, teachers began teaching to the test and promoting rote memorization and recalling of facts instead of a deep understanding. It is my goal to help reverse the devastating effects that NCLB left on the way students learn.

Through my four educational goals, I will seek to reverse the negative effects of *No Child Left Behind.* Promoting the use of technology will motivate my students to engage in instructional activities and become active learners. I will focus on keeping up with current technology opportunities for my students and seek ways to implement them into the curriculum. I will also seek professional development opportunities to better prepare me to implement a multicultural curriculum into my curriculum. It is my hope that the students in my classes become comfortable with each other thus creating an inviting environment where students feel free to share their ideas and thoughts.

The fine arts programs at my school have suffered for years with low budgets and seemingly low importance. It is my goal to promote these programs and for students to acknowledge that a well-rounded education is one that not only focuses on mathematics and reading, but on all subjects. Students have many talents and abilities aside from reading and computing that can open many doors for them and it is important that we start recognizing and celebrating student successes outside of those areas.

Lastly, I will promote deep learning in my classroom. My students will not suffer with tests that only force them to recall information. They will have opportunities to foster their critical thinking skills and creativity. I will provide them with many different options in showing me what they have learned. I believe that this will make for a much more exciting educational experience for the students and for me.

Through these four goals, the effects of NCLB will become lesser and lesser. Students will regain confidence in their individual talents and abilities and they will have less pressure put on them to perform on standardized testing. They will increase their critical thinking skills and have opportunities to express themselves through creativity and cooperation activities. I believe these four goals will increase student success and motivation to learn.

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